

## **Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area and Dominguez Canyon Wilderness FACT SHEET**

### **What does the omnibus lands bill mean to Colorado?**

Under the omnibus lands bill, 209,610 acres of BLM-managed land have been designated as the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (NCA). Within the NCA, 66,280 acres are set aside as the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness Area, which was part of the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness Study Area. The two designations span three western Colorado counties: Mesa, Delta and Montrose; and have been supported by local, regional and national interests for the outstanding resources in the area.

### **What do the designations mean for these public lands?**

The NCA and Wilderness are Congressional designations that recognize the astounding resources and landscapes of the Western Slope. The designation withdraws the area from mining and mineral leasing laws, and provides improved management opportunities for the unique resources of the area. The newly designated areas join 63 other National Landscape Conservation System units in Colorado, which were Congressionally, Presidentially, or administratively selected for their exceptional resource values.

### **What about current rights and uses in these newly designated areas?**

The designating legislation for these areas allows for continued grazing, protects private property rights and access to inholdings, allows for continued invasive species control and fire prevention actions, and protects existing water rights.

### **What is special about the Dominguez-Escalante area?**

Long known for their scenic value, these lands are a popular destination for those wanting to see the spectacular canyon country of the Uncompahgre Plateau. Red-rock canyons and sandstone bluffs covered in pinion-juniper forests hold cultural and historic sites, as well as paleontological and geological resources spanning 600 million years. Ute Tribes today consider these lands an important connection to their ancestral past.

The Escalante, Cottonwood, Little- and Big Dominguez Creeks cascade through sandstone canyon walls that drain the eastern Uncompahgre Plateau. Nearly 30 miles of the Gunnison River flow through the NCA and serve as the boundary for the Wilderness; however, the river is not part of the wilderness. A variety of wildlife call Dominguez-Escalante home, including: desert bighorn sheep, mule deer, golden eagle, mountain lion, black bear, turkey, elk and the collared lizard. Also within the NCA are the Escalante Area of Critical Environmental Concern where fragile hanging gardens and many threatened and endangered species can be found; and the Gunnison Gravels Area of Critical Environmental Concern which contains evidence that the Gunnison River once flowed through Unaweep Canyon.

### **How was the public involved in designating these areas?**

The legislation leading to these designations included information and recommendations gathered from public meetings and discussions that have been underway since 2006. The Mesa State College-Natural Resources and Land Policy Institute; the Public Lands Partnership; the Mesa, Montrose, and Delta county commissions, and the Colorado congressional delegation all took part in this process. The designation has been supported by local governments and local communities.

### **What is a National Conservation Area?**

National Conservation Areas (NCAs) are designated by Congress to conserve, protect, enhance and manage public lands for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. NCAs offer

landscapes with exceptional natural, recreational, cultural, wildlife, aquatic, archeological, paleontological, historical, educational and scientific resources.

The Dominguez-Escalante NCA was established for its geological, cultural, archaeological, paleontological, natural, scientific, recreation, wilderness, wildlife, riparian, historical, educational and scenic values.

**What is a Wilderness Area?**

Wilderness is a legal designation designed to provide long-term protection and conservation of federal public lands. Wilderness is defined by the Wilderness Act of 1964 as “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain . . . Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which

(1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable;

(2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation;

(3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and

(4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.”

**What is the next step in this process?**

The legislation designating these areas directs the BLM to develop a resource management plan (RMP) for the NCA and wilderness. The RMP will provide for the long-term protection and management of the area. The RMP will describe the appropriate uses and management of the NCA and will include a comprehensive travel management plan for the area. The RMP will be developed through extensive public input and will consider information obtained through studies of lands within the NCA. In addition, the Secretary of the Interior will establish a citizen-based advisory council to advise the BLM in the development of the RMP for the area.

**How will this designation affect users in these areas?**

Current users should not see any changes to this area immediately. The designating legislation for the NCA and Wilderness directs BLM to develop a resource management plan for the area that will outline how the resources and uses will be managed within the area. Current valid and existing rights such as grazing will not be affected by the new designations.